

REPRODUCED
BY MARIAN
J. B. B. B. B.



Ms. Tree
Thriller
Quarterly

Number 4 • Summer 1991

Ms. TREE

QUARTERLY

A COMPLETE
Ms. Tree Thriller
by MAX ALLAN COLLINS
and TERRY BEATTY

ALSO

MIDNIGHT

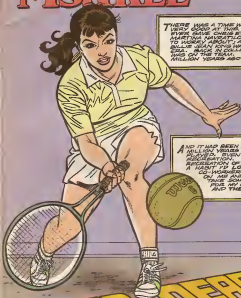
by Edward Gorman
and Rick Burchett



Ms. TREE

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN I WAS VERY GOOD AT THIS. NOT THAT I EVER MADE CAREER SPORTS AND AMBITIOUS AMBITIONISM ANYTHING TO HOPEY ABOUT! ACTUALLY BILLIE JEAN KING WAS MORE MY GEE. BACK IN COLLEGE. WHEN I WAS ON THE TEAM. TWO OR THREE MILLION YEARS AGO.

AND IT HAD BEEN AT LEAST A MILLION YEARS SINCE I'D PLAYED. EVEN JUST FOR RECREATION. IN FACT, RECREATION OF ANY KIND WAS A NIGHT IN LOST. BUT MY CO-WORKERS BANGED UP ON ME AND REQUESTED I TAKE SOME TIME OFF. FOR MY OWN GOOD — AND THEIRS.



DROP DEAD HANDSOME

MAX ALAN COLLINS
ARTIST

CO-CREATOR
MARK WAIN
MANAGER
MARK GOLD
EDITOR

TECH BRATY
IN CHARGE
TOM TROLO
COUNCILOR

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21-JUNE

MY EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT HAD BEEN THE MOST INSISTENT, SO I INVITED HER ALONG. KED HADN'T BEEN KIPPED, AND SHE'D PLAYED A LOT MORE TENNIS THAN I HAD. IN SHORT: GREAT — BUT HER OFFICE BUTTER.

WE WERE SPENDING THE WEEKEND AT WESTBORO PARK, A BEACHY NORTH END CITY. HERE WAS THE SMALLEST BEACHY PARK. AS THE BROOKLINE CALLED IT.

DARIN!
IT'S YOUR
GAME,
MICHAEL....

IN OTHER WORDS,
WE WERE THERE
TO JAB AT HER.

IT'S
LOVE.

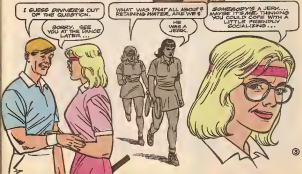
NOT
HANDS.

MY NAME IS MICHAEL TREN. I HEAD UP TREN INVESTIGATIONS, INC., WHICH MAKES ME PROBABLY THE MOST INTERESTING PERSON YOU'VE EVER MET. I'M TOO INTERESTING ABOUT ANY WOMAN, TOO. I'D BE ANY CHANCE TO ABUSE.

THAT WAS A PRETTY
HEATED MATCH. YOU
GUYS LIVE UP TO YOUR
REPUTATION.
MR. TREN.

OH REALLY? WHAT
REPUTATION
IS THAT?

MICHAEL....





COULDN'T YOU HAVE BEEN NICE, YOU SAY JAMES & BUCK AND RICK WERE GOING TO ASK US OUT FOR DINNER...

SAYING IT WAS THAT THEY WERE BOTH MARRIED, YOU KNOW YOU AREN'T JUST A "FRIEND" SUCCEED MEET RAG & FIND AT SPACE / BUCK...

YOU'RE PUTTING UP A WALL, MICHAEL... YOU HAVEN'T HAD A STRONG GUY SINCE YOU BROKE UP WITH THAT NICE, FINE-BOYER BAK... A COUPLE YEARS AGO, YOU NEED A NEW RELATIONSHIP...

I DON'T KNOW, THIS GUY SEEMS SO GOOD, DOESN'T HE? MUCH MORE AM... I JUST DON'T WANT TO PUT OUT FOR A RELATIONSHIP ANYMORE...

COME ON -- GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK, YOU HAD SOME BAD LUCK WITH MEN, IS ALL...



BAD LUCK? I THINK YOU COULD CALL IT BAD LUCK.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THAT GUY, MICHAEL? I DON'T WANT TO HIS NAME'S

HAVEN'T HEARD FROM HIM IN A WHILE. I DON'T THINK HE EVER MET ONE THAT WASN'T TOO GOOD - FORMER, TRACY LYNN.



SO, WE HAD DINNER ALONE, EFFIE AND I, AND "ROCK" TO KEEP US COMPANY.

YOU KNOW, WE NEED A COUPLE OF MEN... JUST TO KEEP OUR REPUTATIONS INTACT?

EFFIE WAS REFERRING TO A RECENT LIMPING GUY INCIDENT IN WHICH SHE'D HEAVILY BEEN MADE THE SUBJECT OF AN "OUTING" BY A GAY PUBLICATION.

YOU CAN GO TO THE "CLASS REUNION" DANCE TONIGHT, AND FOCUS YOUR ENTIRE QUALITY TO YOUR HEART'S CONTENT.

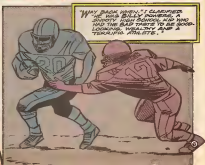
YOU'RE NOT GOING?

I DON'T THINK SO. SOUNDING A LITTLE BOLD--PRETENDING TO BE TEEN-AGING...

WHY? WELL, YOU LOOK WHO THAT IS?

HUH?

"THAT'S WILLIAM POWERS!" EFFIE SAID. "THE REAL ESTATE THROG!" EFFIE WAS THE ONLY WOMAN I KNEW WHO COULD USE WORDS LIKE "THROG" AND "THROGN" WITH NO GREAT VOWEL-REVERENCE.





"BUT YOU SAID YOU DATED HIM..."
"HE WENT OUT," I SAID. "BUT I
THINK IT WAS JUST TO MAKE HIS
UPPER-CRUST GULL FRIEND
JEALOUS. HE HARDLY SPARE
TO ME. NEVER Laid A HAND ON
ME... I REMEMBER TO SAY."





DON'T YOU JUST LOVE IT WHEN THE PASH HAVE MEMORABLE LIVES?



BUT I DIDN'T LOVE IT, REALLY. HE HAD ENOUGH UNHAPPINESS IN HIS LIFE TO FEEL FOR ME. I HAD POWERS RIGHT NOW, AND SOMETHING HAPPENED IN MY PAST. SOME PART OF THEM ARE TERRIBLE. HE FEELS SORRY FOR BILLY.

MAKING THAT WAS WHY I WENT TO THE NORTHMAN'S BILLY ANDERSON'S BIRTHDAY PARTY. NOT THAT I EXPECTED TO SEE POWERS THERE — OR EVEN WANTED CONTACT WITH HIM, OF ANY KIND.

THEY CALLED THE PARTY...



THOUGH HERE THE TEENAGE GIRLS BLAMED BILLY ANDERSON AND JACKSON. HE WAS LOVING THE LOSTENING PART OF LIFE WITHIN AT BILLY'S BIRTHDAY. I DID WANT TO SEE BILLY ANDERSON.

MAKING SHE WANTED IT MORE THAN ANYTHING — WITH A CRYING SO SWEET AND INNOCENT AND PET SO DEEP

WHAT A CUTE IDEA THIS IS

IT'S STUPID. REMEMBER BACK WHEN POWERS WASN'T SUCH A FAN IN THE AREA? SOME WERE THE DAYS...







WE WERE REVERTING TO TEEN-AGE! THE
BELLBOYS (ON THE BELLBOYS!)
HIS NAME "GOSH" AND THE
BELLBOYS LADY LACK WAS SAYING "GEE."







HE DIDN'T HAVE TO GIVE
HIS DIRECTION TO HIS
OFFICE. EVERYBODY
IN CHARGE KNEW THE
POWERS TOWER.



MICHAEL, THERE. I HAVE
AN APPOINTMENT TO SEE
MR. POWERS.

I'M AFRAID
YOU'RE NOT IN THE
COMPUTER.



VICTORIA, MR. TERRY IS
AWAYED EXPECTED. I'LL
TALK HER TO SEE
MR. POWERS.



I'M SORRY ABOUT
THE MISTAKE AND THERE
DON'T BELIEVE
MR. POWERS WOULD
MEET WITH YOU
TO SCHEDULE.
I'M SORRY AGAIN.
BY THE WAY.



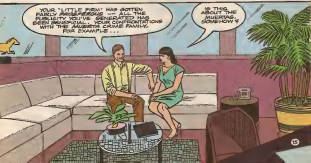
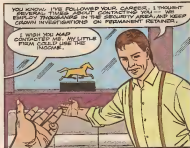
I'M MR.
POWERS,
EXECUTIVE
ASSISTANT.

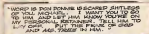
NOT A
HEAD
SIS.

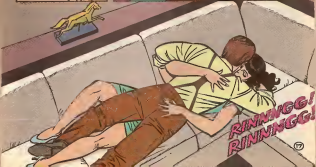
THESE
ARE MYST
DO RIGHT
IN.













**RINGGG!
RINGGG!**



HE WOULDN'T SPEAK FURTHER ON THE SUBJECT. WE RETURNED TO HIS PENTHOUSE APARTMENT ABOVE THE OFFICE.

THIS IS ANDRÉ, MY PERSONAL CHEF, AND I PROVIDED YOU A VERY SPECIAL DINING EXPERIENCE.

MIL, DON'T WORRY. I'LL HAVE YOU BACK SOON. I'LL BE WITH THE REGULARS. BYE-BYE. I'LL BE BACK SOON. MIL.

RAISIN CHICKEN DRUMSTICKS WITH BALSAMIC SAUCE ON THE SIDE... COLE SLAW... ONION SOUP... WITH DOUBLE-CHOCOLATE FANTASIES ON THE WAY.

IT'S A DEEP DRESS-IN SPECIAL.

NOT THE REAL THING... BUT THE BEST SIMULATION ANDRÉ COULD MANAGE.

MY COMPLIMENTS, ANDRÉ.

THANK YOU, MADAM.

DO YOU LIKE IT? I OWN A LOT OF IT. YOU CAN HAVE AS MUCH AS YOU LIKE.



I SPOKE THE NIGHT, BUT I
LEFT BEFORE BREAKFAST...

YOU SURE
YOU WANT TO GO?
AFTER WHOP UP A
MEAN CIGARETTE...

I'M SURE HE DOES.
BUT I ALREADY
HAVE A FULL PLATE
TODAY...



AFTER STOPPING AT HOME TO POUR MY
UP AND DOWN, AND CHANGING IN AT
THE OFFICE, WHEN I HAD A PHONE
CONVERSATION WITH A CLIENT
I MADE A CALL AT THE CORPORATE
OFFICES OF ANANTA ENTERTAINMENT.



I DON'T HAVE AN APPOINTMENT.
JUST TELL DOMINIC I'M HERE--
HE'LL SEE ME.

JUST A
MOMENT,
MR. TROSE...



WELL, TRY
TO SEE
MR. BUNTA.



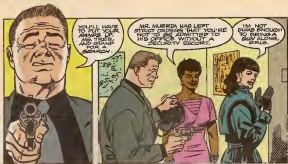
IT'LL BE
JUST A FEW
MINUTES...

THAT'S TOO LONG--
A WAIT, I'LL GO IN.
THANKS.



EXCUSE
ME.









I MADE AN ATTEMPT
ON HIS LIFE. WE FLEY
AWAY BALL, BUT HE
AUNT T WANT BRUIN
BESIDES...

...IF I DID
WANT HER KILLED,
I WOULD HAVE
KILLED HER
PEOPLE TO DO
THE JOB.

WHO
WOULD
YOU HAVE
THINK?



"THAT NONE OF HIS. TO JUST
GIVE HER A LITTLE NUDGE.
EVERYBODY KNOWS SHE'S
THREATENED HIS LIFE
AWAY TIMES."

AT THE OFFICE, I REPORTED TO HOLLY D'AMICO, SENIOR COLUMN
IN THE TIMES TRACKING THE LOCAL CELEBRITY DIST...



GOT YOUR PAM HOLLY -
THANKS FOR GETTING
RIGHT ON THIS.

NO PROBLEM,
AND IT'S NOT
JUST Gossip...



...HIS AND MRS. POWERS HAD A BIG
SCANDAL - ALLEGEDLY ALLEGED FIGHT
AT THE OFFICE OF THE SENIOR
PHOTOGRAPHY SHOWING LAST MONTH.



SHE THREATENED
HIS LIFE...
ALLEGEDLY SHE WAS ON
RECORD ABOUT
ON HER...

I REPORTED TO MY CLIENT, WHO
WAITED ALL FOR A LIFE SUPPER ON
HIS YACHT WHICH WAS DOCKED
AT THE LAKEFRONT MARINA.

I'M GLAD
THE MEETING WITH
DON DONNIE WENT
SMOOTHLY.



I ONLY HAD TO ROUGH UP
ONE GREGGORY BAKER,
THAT WASN'T EVEN PAID
FOR THE COURAGE.

HOW CAN A WOMAN SO
SWEET... SO TENDER...
HAVE SUCH A MEAN
STREAK?



HOW CAN A SWEET-TEMPERED
GUY LIKE YOU BE THE MOST
RUTHLESS BUSINESSMAN
IN TOWN?

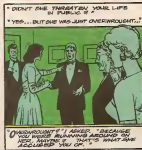


IT'S LIKE I SAID
BEFORE: I JUST HATE
BEAUTIFUL, INTELLIGENT
WOMEN TO DO MY DIRTY
WORK FOR ME.

BUT NOT EVERY "BEAUTIFUL,
INTELLIGENT WOMAN" IN YOUR
LIFE IS CO-OPERATING.
RIGHT?

WHAT
DO YOU
MEAN?





MELODEE IS A VERY ASSURANCE
PERSON -- HER FATHER AND MOTHER
BROKE UP WHEN SHE WAS YOUNG AND...
WELL, I'LL SHARE YOUR DAVESTORE
PSYCHOLOGY. LET'S JUST SAY SHE'S
ASSURANCE AND LEAVE IT AT THAT.

IF MELODEE TRULY IS THIS "OVERWROUGHT"
... EVEN ESSENTIALLY OVERSTATED...
YOU NEED TO BE CAREFUL. I HEARD
YOU MENTION A GUY ON THE PHONE.
WHEN YOU SPEAK WITH HER.



SHE
WOULDN'T
HURT A
FLY.

THAT'S WHAT
ANTHONY PEARSON SAID
ABOUT HIS MOTHER
IN AFRICA.



LISTEN TO ME, BELL! YOU'RE AN
EXECUTIVE -- YOU KNOW ALL ABOUT
CHARTS AND GRAPHS AND STATISTICS.
WELL, THE STATISTICS SAY THAT
ASSURANCE USUALLY HAPPEN WITHIN
FAMILIES -- MOSTLY BETWEEN
HUSBANDS AND WIVES.



WHAT AM I
SUPPOSED TO DO
ABOUT IT?

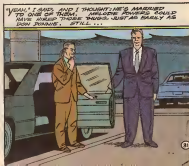
GO THROUGH
WITH IT -- FILE
FOR DIVORCE
AND YOU NEED TO
TAKE PRECAUTIONS
... YOU MAY NEED
TIGHTER
SECURITY.











HANDS BEHIND
YOU. QUICK.
NOW...

DO SIT UNDER THAT
COCONUT TREE, KONGS—
I NEED A MOMENT
WITH YOUR BOSS.

ARE YOU
MAD? NO, I'VE
GOTTEN IT!

GUNS KEEP ASKING ME THAT:
NOT A SMART QUESTION FOR A
GIRL WITH A GUN.

YOUR CONVENY PARKING SPACE
REMARKS A HIDE-OUT POINT IN YOUR
SECURITY SET-UP, DON'THIS. GUESS I
MUST'VE FORGOT TO POINT THAT OUT
WHEN I WAS WORKING
FOR YOU...

I GAINED HIM UP HE'D SENT THOSE
"SALADS" TO THE WARD, LAST NIGHT...

I DON'T KNOW
ANYTHING ABOUT
IT, AND I NEVER
SAW THESE
GUNS.

IF YOU'RE
LYING, DONNE—
IT'S GONNA BE
SOY MOUSSE!...

MR. TENSE— YOU ARE
DEFINITELY CRAZY.
BUT YOU ARE ONE
LADY I GOT AN
INTEREST IN
SPEAKING WITH.

THAT EVENING, ALL PROVE ME
TO BE "LITTLE BOYS"
ON THE LAKE.

HIS CHAUFFEUR DROPPED ME
OFF. HE'D BE PICKED UP
TOMORROW, MID-MORNING.

EVEN LEFT MY
SUITS HOME.
HOW YOU DON'T WANT
BEING STRANDED
WITH ME.

THESE ARE HORRIBLE
RATES. HOW CAN A
BIG BOY LIKE YOU
AFFORD TO GO
INDEMNIFIED
LIKE THIS?

CAN'T AFFORD NOT TO,
NOW AND THEN -- FOR MY
SANTY ... BARRY?

WELL,
WELL?

LEFT MY KEYS AT THE
OFFICE. HOW YOU DON'T
WANT BEING STRANDED
AND BARRING.

ISN'T THERE
AN ALARM
SYSTEM?

ACTUALLY, YES -- BUT IT'S
HOOKED TO THE DECK. I
KNOW A HANDYMAN WHO CAN
GET IT.

CAREFUL OF THE GLASS!
I'LL MAKE A CRIMINAL
OUT OF YOU YET!

NOT EXACTLY A
WHITE-COLLAR
CRIME, IS IT?

BREAK-AND-ENTER IS NOT. IT DIDN'T TAKE US LONG TO
MAKE OURSELVES AT HOME...

I THINK I
SHOULD HAVE
A FEW MORE
LITTLE CHAT
WITH YOUR
WIFE.

I'D RATHER
YOU DIDN'T.
IN THE FIRST
PLACE, YOU
BOTH HAVE A
TEMPER...

IN THE SECOND, I JUST
CAN'T PICTURE MYSELF
HOLDING THOSE THINGS.

SHE'S BEEN OPERATING
IN THE WORLD OF HIGH
FINANCE SINCE SHE
WAS A KID...

"...HER FATHER WAS
AN IDEALIST. LONG
BEFORE YOU
EVER WERE... AND
THE POOR ALWAYS
HAVE A WAY OF
FINDING SOMEBODY
TO DO THEIR DIRTY
WORK FOR THEM."

LET'S NOT TALK ABOUT
HER, ANYMORE. IN FACT,
LET'S NOT TALK AT ALL...







BLAM!
BLAM!

BLAM!
KA-BLAM!



OH
MY LORD,
OH
GOD.

SHE'S SOME
MURDERER... YOU HAD
NO CHOICE. SHE WAS
GOING TO KILL US.



DON'T
BLAME
YOURSELF.



CALL THE SANITARIUM DEPARTMENT.
THIS IS A COUNTY MATTER, NOT CITY.
BUT THEN I'LL CALL MY FRIEND
ALICE KILLEN IN MEMPHIS ... HE MAY
BE ABLE TO SANCTIFY THE WAY.







I DROPT HER INTO THE AFTERNOON BUT THE FIRST I FINALLY STUMBLED INTO THE OFFICE. THE DAY WAS ALL BUT OVER—NINETEEN FIVE. MY STUFF WAS WAITING FOR ME.

GOOD, YOU'RE HERE.

HUH?

INTO THE CONFERENCE ROOM NOW.

MY PARTNER, ROGER FREEMONT AND DAN GREEN, HAD BEEN ON THE CASE ALL DAY. IT SEEMED.

I'VE CHECKED ON THE HEALTH BACKGROUND OF MELBORE YOUNGS, AND SHE DOES HAVE A HISTORY OF MENTAL ILLNESS.

NOTHING EXACTLY EXAGGERATED, BUT SHE WAS A NERVOUS, SCARY WOMAN... BAD TEMPER.

I CAME TO THE WOMAN'S BEST FRIEND—A GOLD COAST PHYSICIAN NAMED JENNIFER STEINBERG.

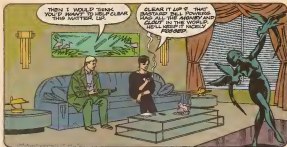
"SHE WAS RELUCTANT TO LET ME IN AT FIRST," DAN SAID.

I TOLD THE OTHER DETECTIVES EVERYTHING I KNOW.

"I DIDN'T CORRECT HER ASSUMPTION I WAS A COP," DAN SAID. "SHE'D HAVE BEEN EVEN LESS FRIENDLY IF SHE KNEW WHO I WORKED FOR."

JUST A FEW FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS, IF YOU DON'T MIND.

I MIND VERY MUCH. MY BEST FRIEND IN THE WORLD IS GONE.



"I WENT AFTER HER, THOUGH," DAN SAID, "AND SOME INTERESTING THINGS CAME OUT..."









THAT COSSAGE WAS WHERE MELODIE WAS
LIVING. DURING THE ALTERNATION, BUT FEW
PEOPLE KNEW THAT. YOU MADE SURE
THERE WAS NO CAR IN FRONT, BECAUSE YOUR
CHADWICK DROD US OFF.



YOU 'FORGOT' YOUR KEYS... WE BROKE A
WINDOW AND WENT IN, SO THAT MELODIE
COULD COME HOME AND DISCOVER WHAT
SEEMED TO BE EVIDENCE OF A
BORNEAR'S PRESENCE...



YOU FILLED ME WITH STORIES OF
YOUR WOLFEY, PARANOID WIFE --
MANIPULATING ME INTO WARRING
YOU OF HOW DANGEROUS SHE
MIGHT BE. ALL THE WHILE
SETTING ME UP TO PULL
THE TRIGGER.



YOU KNEW SO MUCH ABOUT ME. YOU
KNEW HOW CRAZY I WAS ABOUT HER
WHEN SHE WERE DEAD. YOU KNEW
HOW EASILY I WOULD PERSEDE. YOU
TOOK ADVANTAGE OF MY
EVERY WEAKNESS.



OF COURSE, ONE OF MY WEAKNESSES IS A
STRENGTH. OF SORTS... YOU A MERE OF AN
EXCELLENCE. THAT'S WHAT YOU SAW IN
ME. AFTER ALL, ISN'T IT?



MICHAEL...
NO...
DON'T...

I'M NOT GOING TO LIE TO
YOU ANYMORE. IT'S TRUE.
ALL OF IT. I... I USED
YOUR COUNTESS ON YOUR
LONG-AND AFFECTION FOR
ME. I DID IT. I... I USED
YOU TO GET RID OF MY WIFE.







YOU
BASTARD!



THE EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT
HAD THROTTLED BY
LINDA BELLARD.



HE
SAID HE
LOVED
HER.

WOW WERE THE
OTHER WOMAN
YOU MANICURED
AS HIS WIFE AT THE
MORTUARY!



I TOOK THE SHOT-OUT
OF HER HAND! SHE
DON'T FIGHT ME.

I JUST
DID MY
BEST A
FUCKER.

I KNOW YOU
DID, BUT DON'T
LOOK TO COME UP
FOR YOU

"I CALLED THE TRIGGER." I SAID. "MY
GODDAM THE OTHER TWO HELPED
BLAY POLKING KILL HIS WIFE."



THE
END



LAST NIGHT, WHILE INVESTIGATING ANOTHER CASE, MIDNIGHT SAW THE ABANDONMENT OF A BABY...



SO MIDNIGHT TOOK THE BABY HOME TO PROTECT HER...



... BUT NOW IT'S MORNING AND MIDNIGHT WANTS TO GIVE THE BABY BACK.

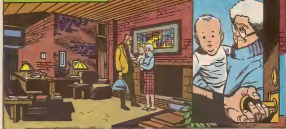


Papa MIDNIGHT

ED GORMAN • STORY
ARON BURGHEIT • ART
GAIL JANSONE • COLORE
JOHN COSTANZO • LETTERS
JOHNNIE ARROY • EDITOR

ONCE A WEEK MRS. COOMBS
COMES IN TO CLEAN MR. AVERY'S
APARTMENT, UNWARE OF HER
EMPLOYER'S SECRET LIFE.

BUT TODAY SHE'S GOT
SPECIAL DUTIES WHILE
MR. AVERY GOES OUT.



BY DAY, ARTHUR AVERY LOOKS
LIKE ANY OTHER THIRTY-FIVE-YEAR-
OLD MAN HEADED INTO THE CITY
ON A PLEASANT AUTUMN MORNING.

HIS EVENING COSTUME ATTRACTING
TOO MUCH ATTENTION, HE DRESSES
CASUALLY, TRYING TO ATTRACT AS
LITTLE ATTENTION AS POSSIBLE...

... EXCEPT FOR
HIS \$60,000
SPORTS CAR.

MAX REPAIR 116



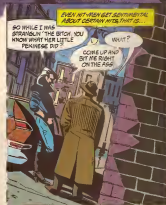
FOR THE NEXT HALF HOUR,
MIDNIGHT SEARCHES THE BLOCK
LOOKING FOR THE BUILDING THE
WOMAN RAN INTO LAST NIGHT.



MIDNIGHT SPENDS THE REST OF THE DAY IN THE APARTMENT WITH THE FRIGHTENED WOMAN. THEN AT NIGHT HE SLIPS INTO THE BATHROOM...

WELL YOU'RE MIDNIGHT, IS?

NOW THAT IT'S NIGHT, MIDNIGHT IS GOING TO ON THE MEN TO MAKE THEIR MOVE... BUT NOT BEFORE HE DOES.



THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT, ARBRIGHT CHECKED ON HOW THE NIGHTMID BUSINESS, JERRY AUSTIN CO. (JC), THEY TOOK THINGS GOING DOWN TO THE CORNER TO GET COFFEE

YOU WANT REGULAR?

YEAH, BLACK.

SEE YOU IN A FEW MINUTES.

LOOK AT THAT HAIR-- HE LOOKS LIKE A GODDESS WOMAN.

HEY BABE, TWO COFFEES, BLACK.

GEEZ, WHAT A GREAT NIGHT FOR A HIT!









DC COMICS INC.
625 FIFTH Avenue New York, NY 10020

JOHN H. COLE, President & Editor-in-Chief
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Mr. hoooooooooo!

Yes, after three issues of silence, I am back—Max Allan Collins has won sweet good-natured silence at the helm of SPAR. Logistical and other problems have kept me from putting in the previous DC SPAR column, but after two issues' hiatus—which included several letters I felt I had to respond to—I started me get back on track, and Mike Gold has really come through.

Mike's interesting response to several of last issue's letters, and way before we dig into this issue's letters, I would like to ask any SPAR contributors to please write down your misuses ASAP, after reading a current issue. Our readers seem to think our quarterly schedule means that they can be lazily about sending their SPAR contributions; not so—deadlines at DC come much sooner than back in Mr. TREE's independent days. What are Terry Davis's? Note that many of the letters have refer to issue 46. Get your letters about 46 out right now! What are you waiting for? Drop everything!

We'll wait for you.

Dear de dear dear, Dear de dear dear dear, Dear already? Sweet! What you were gone, we all bawled the Dropped them.

Now to last issue's letters.

Fred Auerbach, a previous SPAR correspondent, wants to see me back writing this column. You get your wish, Fred! Now, what in the hell is the idea of saying Midnight "wack"—do you eat with that mouth? When you come to my house, wipe off your feet and behave yourself. And if you think something "wack," I expect you to at least spell it out with some examples. (I like Ed Gorman's Midnight and think it's a most boring feature—a nice combo of our detection and Science-Fiction departments.)

Another SPAR veteran, David Malinow Parls, alleges that the character Janshchik in "The Devil's Punchbowl" is a re-try of B. Lyle Layman from the WILD MAN comic in ACTION COMICS WEEKLY, "Moral Hazard." In the first place, he expects a writer not to have recurring motifs, themes and even character types in his stories. In the second place, Janshchik and Layman have almost nothing in common as characters other than hypocrisy—the former is a church leader and backslider in a small community; the latter is a demagogue heading up a nation-wide movement. I never used the term "Moral Hazard" in "The Devil's Punchbowl" to describe Janshchik or the small-town church. You're reading it.

There was a strong, condemning tone in many of the letters last issue. Let's get this straight: I'm in

charge of the strong condemnation around here!

Dear Tom Shipman

MS TREE QUARTERLY #2 was a nice mixed bag of stuff.

Midnight was really groovy, a team story, and the backside got them bygone.

There is my first impression of the controversial The Rubber, who I understand has been revealed in letters for being all violence and no thought. Well, at this time, the narrative style of the story suffered him up. He seems like a writer capable of doing a 20th-Century bestseller.

I'm strongly in favor of continuing narrative prose stories with numerous characters. Also, give us a last great parody of Mr. Tree and Wild Dog. Heck, maybe they'll get married.

The main story—it was good until the resolution of the culprit, which was the "way you eat" and earning a little too much towards the author's own liberal issues. The narrator's commentary isn't ALWAYS the villain, and these records are getting to be too much even for the record companies!

Midnight was a well-crafted story. What appeared to be a simple, straightforward one resulted up into something with at least half a dozen logical suspects. So far current writers even know HOW to write mysteries these days. Max Collins has the advantage over so many in this respect I don't think he'll ever write a dull story.

Also, thanks for including Ed Debevoise there in the story. I ate there on a visit to Chicago and it's even more of a redoubt than you made it appear. Also the novel level of an elevator teetering into almost place. Love those and Purple Cow. With or without the cat again.

Charles D. Brown
PO Box 1000
Brynmore, PA 19001

Charles Brown is new to SPAR, but not to me! Charles has been a great friend to the BUCK TRACT strip for years now, sending along useful snippets of crime and Crime-fighting tips.

Both Terry and I are Ed Debevoise's Diner fans, but I think it was Terry's idea to use it in the story. It was my idea, on the other hand, to depict the woman gagging as she went about to his table—largely while reporter Rich Kildridge discussed the writing habits of Debevoise.

Charles, maybe "The Devil's Punchbowl" does reveal my own "Moral Hazard." But who else? I mean do you expect a story to reveal? Fiction has created a vacuum—it better grow out of the author's beliefs and thoughts and even biases, or what value does it have as self-expression?

The other day I told Mike Gold that I didn't consider myself either liberal or conservative; that I stood in the middle of the road, where people from both directions could get on equal footing at reaching me down.

Mike's argument was that I wasn't just standing in the middle of the road—I was jumping up and down in it, like a crazy person.

Dear People,

I've been reading MS TREE since it first came out. I've never had any complaints with the stories or the art. But (here it comes), I do have some complaints with issue #2 of MS TREE QUARTERLY. I do think that the subject matter would make an interesting story. That is, of course, before I read it. I am also a fan of Mr. Collins' mystery, and find them very well researched. Reminded in the boy world here. This is why I was very surprised by reading MTQ #2. Did Mr. Collins write an episode of Groucho?

I am a fan of mine in general as well as a fan of heavy metal, and I am not a Satan worshiper in any sense of the word. I also know a lot of people who are God-fearing worshippers who worship outdoors, some in the ways that were described in MTQ #2, and none of them are Satan worshippers either.

I found MTQ #2 to be very poorly written as a whole. To be honest with you, I was quite shocked by it.

David Burton
PO Box 4120
Memphis, TN 38108

David, I did loads of research on Satanism and Paganism for "The Devil's Punchbowl" although I never made it through Groucho's special. I think the story is clearly a freedom of speech tale. If you think an old rock 'n' roller like me (who probably was performing heavy metal music before you were born) would in any way be pre-occupied bawling/bawling, you're just not paying attention.

Try reading the issue again—backwards.

Dear Mike, Max and Terry

I found the last MS TREE QUARTERLY to be an interesting, intelligent book, and purchased the second. At first I was extremely disappointed, the characterizations and stereotypes were ridiculous (what spelled backward for Satanism went in Larders). Then came the plot twist, perhaps this was done to show that "You can't judge a book by its cover" that explaining the wildly exaggerated stereotypes I, for one, have been listening to groups with names like Faith No More and Black Sabbath for years and have yet to sacrifice anything besides the constant of yams in the Cook of Hungary!

The plot twist also provided another angle for the director of *Darkness*. There is nothing as terrifying as a man who is a divine mission to fulfill. From the massacre of *Madness* and *Justice* in the woods in *Guernsey*, holy missions have had great effects. Even Hitler declared that Nazism was not a political party, "rather, we are a religion." The fictional Aryans' racist "religion" resulted in the greatest tragedy of war history, the slaughter of an entire people. Likewise, I am a bit less frightened of people listening to bands with names like *RAVENS* and *Lamb-Christ* than those from my four records.

And so, your book, at first seemingly ordinary, arrives with something extremely thought-provoking. Thanks so much to completion.

Daryl Storch
211 W Foster Ave. Apt. 12
Palo Alto University
Palo Alto, CA 94301

Everybody:

Once again, *MS THREE QUARTERS* did me a good, solid read. The "Ray Beahm" story was quite honest. It doesn't seem there are paid guys on either side. Unfortunately life is often like this. I applaud Deane and Sandy for taking such a difficult story.

I really enjoy the last stories. The Webster saga seems very accurate. I just can't get enough of *Penumbra*.

Tom D. Ashberry
1455 N. Ford St. #20
Berkeley, CA 94702

Unfortunately, Todd, the last stories have been dropped from *MS THREE*, for production reasons more than anything else. I was supposed to write at least one of those *Mr. Hand WILD DOG* tales. The last, but we're strongly considering a *MS THREE RENTS WILD DOG* story.

Dear Max and Terry:

"*Shelter in the Cave?*" was going very well until the last couple of pages. The revelation of Mr. Hand's homosexuality was too convenient and too quick an answer to Mike Jensen's homophobia. Whatever his feelings' origins, it was clear that Mike has, at that level, a fancy feeling about how gay fellow humans behave, and the revelation that suddenly feeling and someone he knew to be an okay guy was in fact, all these years, gay, could automatically change those feelings to almost nothing.

Heterophobia, like was otherwise an excellent story. Typical (without actually mentioning AIDS), interesting, and involving the sort when we know and love an individual and personal feelings. Anything controversial makes everyone feel more, sad, really. The rights of homosexuals remain uncontroverted, against any of number of you'll get any correspondence that condones your "hating prejudice" or something? You also highlighted the fact that in any minority group, there will be a sub-group whose way of expressing themselves tends to bring them on their friends' exactly the sort of condemnation they're fighting against, as demonstrated here by the church black-leather women.

Following up that story with another whose opening page had a war on speed-dial as a lie and pants with the up

and/or was not a good idea. Conclusions is, the more, a fine subject or theme for a story, and the tale worked well, if mostly, but I think some should be careful not to have images of women that, without the pretense of a belief in their value or value, would look merely exotic.

Michael Dwyer
344 E 4th St
Berkeley, California
Ray Lancaster 415-8411
England

Malcolm, I remember seeing on page 274-275 at least strongly implying, and on some that one conclusion—that a member of the *MS THREE* cast was gay, but that until the context of a specific story made the conclusion, unambiguous or at least pertinent, I wouldn't get into such and every character's private sex life. I am as often in the publisher as the writer-model business.

As for the dilemma of Mike's revealing his feelings about guys due to Mr. Hand's revelation, sure, real life isn't that tidy. The last time I looked, *MS THREE* was a comic book—a pulp drama. We pulled in broader strokes than real life, so far that matter a great virtue.

On the other hand, I don't think Mike "changes" his feelings about guys. I think he balances his love against guys for his love for fellow-figure Mr. Hand, and Mr. Hand (and guys) comes out the victor. But accepting Mr. Hand for who and what he is will help Mike toward an overall happiness, more tolerant view.

Dear Max, Mike, and Terry:

How is it I know, after seeing his appearance on page 23, that, before the story was over, Mr. Hand would turn out to be gay? I hope his being gay won't come out of the moment thing.

When you and Terry were creating the Trio, was it a conscious effort not to make her a suspect? I ask because it seems like every parent guy ever created is either a suspect or used to be one.

Did you catch that report on Bobby Davis in a recent "Entertainment Tonight"? They mentioned a movie in his life in the works. Was he doing that about gay stuff? I think he should either be played by his son (a total dead ring) or John Lennon.

In the recent Hollywood story, in *DOCK TRACY*, why did you bring Marshall back? Didn't he drown in his first and only post-Tracy?

Deane (the Grand Wizard Jr.)
1850 Union Commerce
Evanston, IL 60202

Malcolm, as I mentioned above to Malcolm, I've known for a long, long time that Mr. Hand is gay. It's something I intended to pay off when the time came. And it wasn't easy, letting my tongue about the subject, when Terry and I were taking heat in two national magazine articles for *Andy Beahm*, about our supposed homophobia.

I just didn't think smoking was a habit Mr. Trio would acquire—she's too smart, and too physically fit. I have tended to avoid having my own characters smoke ever since coming years ago. Dan Thompson shared me in a review of my first novel, *RAIT MONEY*, for practically giving the reader unpleasant, what

with the protagonist Nolan's constant tough-guy lightning. In my next novel, *Malcolm* quit smoking.

Now readers' questions about Bobby Davis' name question are hardly informed that I am the late war-era self-appointed member of the Trio, a fact well known to readers of *SWAN* since I think Harry Connick, Jr., is the man to play Davis—he's already done Davis, after all, young rock, funk, and soul. Connick's not nearly the magnificent Davis was, however.

Marshall disappeared in a 1978 *TRACY* continuity, in which I revealed that his drowning death was false. That Rich Fletcher drama tale will be repeated next year in a St. Martin's Press collection, *DICK TRACY'S FINEST HOUR*, along with a generous helping portion of Gould stuff (and two more of my stories, drawn by Dick Lockart).

Dear Mike and Katie:

Thank you for bringing back the detective genre to DC Comics with *MS THREE QUARTERS*. You really capped each of the last three issues.

While I had figured out what the "hook" of "Shelter in the Cave" was early on the story, nevertheless I loved seeing the story unfold. I will admit—I'm a reader for a good issue-related comic story. Some people may find such stories "predictable," but I find them much more interesting on the whole than multi-part issues of mad gods attempting to destroy the world. *Colossus* strips did so much as to 48 pages—he wrote an intriguing mystery, placed me on his several great character angles, and not only dealt with issues regarding homophobia in society, but, in my opinion, lived each of us, whether gay or straight, to look into ourselves and examine our own attitudes.

Frank Ballou
address withheld by request

—Max Allan Collins

